



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- FEBRUARY 2024

The monthly ‘**Media Freedom Review**’ is a publication of the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) produced from the monitoring and reporting on freedom of expression and of the press, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone.

In February 2024, MRCG monitored the invitation and detention of two journalists in Freetown. It also followed up on various issues, including the attack on the office and staff of a radio in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, the online ‘death threat’ against a journalist, assault on a journalist, alleged destruction of property of a journalist in Freetown while on duty, alleged assault on a journalist in Moyamba district, alleged verbal threat against a journalist by a police officer, alleged physical assault of two journalists, alleged ‘assassination attempt’ on a journalist in Kambia district, the matter of former Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) boss, Ady Macauley Esq., the alleged physical assault on a journalist in Waterloo, the matter between a journalist and a magistrate in Pujehun and other media engagements.



Journalist Alie Bai Kamara, the Station Manager of *Citizen Radio 103.7 FM* was on 8 February 2024 invited by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in Freetown for questioning and later detained at the CID. The Deputy Station Manager, Ibrahim Kalokoh (DJ Kalux), told MRCG that the invitation and detention of Alie Bai Kamara was related to a broadcast the radio did on the incident of the 26 November 2023 ‘attempted coup.’ According to him, on 26 November 2023, a group of soldiers stormed the radio and ordered the radio’s security guard to

switch on the transmitter, so they could make some announcements, which the security guard failed to do. He explained that the Independent Media Commission (IMC) had invited them, investigated the matter and cautioned them, noting that they were surprised by the invitation of the CID, almost 70 days after IMC had investigated and warned the station not to be involved in such an incident. After spending a night in detention at the CID, Alie Bai Kamara was released the following day. Police confirmed the invitation and detention and said that the matter was still under police investigation.



Journalist Emmanuel C Thorli, Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, was arrested and detained at the CID in Freetown, allegedly for his news article titled ‘**We Cannot Wait For Bio To Continue In Power Until 2028**’, which was published on 21 February 2024. Mr. Thorli told MRCG that police detained him because of the news article he published, noting that the police claimed that it was ‘inciting.’ He continued that after spending three days in detention he

was released with the condition that he reports to the CID every day, until otherwise instructed by the police. Police confirmed the arrest and detention of the journalist and told MRCG that the matter was still under investigation.

In a follow up on the attack on the office and staff of *Hope FM 93.3* in Makeni, Northern Sierra Leone, by a group of thugs reportedly sent by the landlord of the premises housing the radio in October 2023, Mr. Stanley Bangura, proprietor of the radio, told MRCG that they had reached an agreement to settle the matter out of court and the landlord had agreed to extend the tenancy of the radio. He, however, said that they were still negotiating the compensation for both the damage caused and the assault.

On the judgement delivered by the High Court of Sierra Leone in July 2023 in a civil defamation matter between the Inspector General of Police (IGP) William F. Sellu and The Society for *Radio Democracy FM 98.1* and Alex Lawrence Koroma, Producer *Radio Democracy 98.1 FM* concerning a defamatory broadcast on 23 May 2023, the matter commenced in November 2023 for assessment of damages and the High Court had ordered the plaintiff to present the cost of damages, but that was still yet to be done.

On the online ‘death threat’ against Musa S. Kamara, a journalist working for radio *Democracy 98.1 FM*, the matter is still under police investigation. Musa still maintained that he was yet to hear from the police regarding their investigations. Police said they were still investigating the matter.

On the matter of the *BBC* Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana, who was attacked by supporters of the All Peoples Congress (APC) party during the party’s press conference at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown on 14 June 2023, Mr. Fofana again told MRCG that he had not received any update from the APC Party on its said investigation since June 2023, The Secretary General of the APC, Lansana Dumbuya Esq., maintained that the matter was still under investigation.



On the complaint by Ibrahim Alusine Kamara, Managing Editor of *Salone Compass Newspaper*, against some security officials who allegedly assaulted him, endangered his life and vandalized his vehicle during an incident at the APC’s press conference on 25 June 2023 at the party’s headquarters in Freetown, the Police said that they had commenced investigation into the matter. The journalist, Mr. Kamara, told MRCG that after he was invited by the police in December 2023 to assist them with further investigation including the identification of the suspects, no new developments had been made and he had also not received any update from them. Hawalyn Kamara,

Investigating Officer of the Independent Police Complaint Board (IPCB), said that their investigation on the matter had stalled due to ‘lack of identification’ of the security officials who assaulted the journalist. She continued that the security forces deployed on the day of the incident was a joint force, with masks on and that they could not identify the exact officers who assaulted the journalist. She, however, said that they were still investigating the matter.

There is still no new development on the alleged attack and assault on the Station Manager of *Fountain of Peace Radio* (FOP) in Moyamba District, Alie Tokowa that happened on 28 March 2023, at the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP’s) office in Moyamba, by the party’s supporters on the instruction of the outgoing District Council Chairman, Mr. Joseph Gbogba. Journalist Tokowa maintained that the State had withdrawn the matter from the police, with no progress. Local Unit Commander of police in Moyamba, ASP Franklyn Bawoh, told MRCG that the matter was with the State Counsel, Ballah Sesay.

On the case of journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh at the Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone (HRCSL) concerning a complaint against Magistrate Joseph Toby of Pujehun Magistrate Court (formerly of

Magistrate Court Number 2 in Kenema), Al Mansaray, the owner of *TV-News24*, in March 2023, had posted on his channel that he had filed a legal paper against the United States Government through the U.S. State Department for failing to take appropriate action when he alerted them about the abuse of power and unprofessional conduct of Magistrate Toby. The MRCG is still monitoring the matter.



There had been no progress in relation to the verbal threat made by a police officer and the ‘assassination attempt’ on Gibril Gottor, a freelance journalist in Kambia. In January 2024, the police maintained that they had still not yet got a witness or evidence to substantiate the complaint made by Gibril to aid their investigation.

On the matter between the Managing Editor of *Night Watch Newspaper*, Emmanuel Christian Thorli and the staff of Njala University, Mr. Thorli said that he was yet to be updated by the police on the matter. The Acting Public Relations Officer for Njala University, Ayuba Koroma, still maintained that, they had amicably resolved the matter in an informal way. Police said investigations on the matter were pending.



There has been no progress on the matter of the former Anti-Corruption Commissioner, Ady Macauley Esq, who was arrested and detained at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for expressing his legal opinion on the 1965 Public Order Act (POA) in relation to freedom of assembly in October 2022. He was released, but the matter was still at the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP). The Director of Operations at CID, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Dr. John Martin Senesie told MRCG that the Directorate of

Public Prosecution told them to put the investigation on hold.

The matter of Alimamy N’Jai Sesay, who was charged with five counts of various offences in the Cyber Security and Crime Act No. 7 of 2021 for sharing Abdul Will Kamara, alias Adebayor’s audios on social media, is still at the High Court for trial and the accused still in remand. There had been one bail application when the matter initially commenced at the magistrate court, which was denied, and no bail application since it was committed to the High Court. The matter was adjourned to 7 March 2024.

The MRCG on 8 and 9 February 2024 conducted public lectures with media and journalism students of Central University in Mile 91, Njala University and the Every Nation Polytechnic in Bo on Media Freedom, Reforms and Capacity Building in Sierra Leone. The aim of the engagements was part of MRCG’s outreach to students and institutions to share and discuss its reports and publications on media and journalism in [Sierra Leone](#).

The details of the cases and issues will be published in the MRCG Bi-Annual Press Freedom Report for December 2023 to May 2024.

The MRCG’s freedom of expression and of the press, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone initiative is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States of America. The MRCG seeks to strengthen democratic dialogue and accountability, consolidate peace and ensure development through professional, independent and sustainable media, based on the right to freedom of expression and of the press.

MRCG is the coordinating Secretariat for media reform, research and capacity building. It comprises Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Guild of Editors (GoE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), Sport Writers Association of Sierra Leone (SWASAL), Mass Communication (Fourah Bay College), Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC), Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).